# SENECA'S *AGAMEMNON*

WILLIAM M. CALDER III

*Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose.—Janis Joplin*

HORACE at *Satires* 2. 3. 259 ff. illustrates the irrationality of passion by citing almost exactly Terence *Eunuchus* 46–63, where the distraught youth Phaedria inquires of his slave Parmeno whether he ought to return to Thais. Persius' indebtedness to his Horatian model is well known. Because Horace cited *Eunuchus*, so shall Persius. But there is a difference. Persius adduces (5. 160 ff.) the Menandrean original: Chaerestratus inquires of Davus whether he should return to Chrysis. Persius read the *exemplaria graeca*, not the natives. Something happened between 30 B.C. and A.D. 60. The Augustan revival encouraged exploitation of the Republican literary past and of its glory, tragedy.[1] But a less necessarily chauvinistic generation found the crudeness of Republican drama embarrassing. Suetonius (*Gram.* 24) relates that at his time the *veteres libelli* could be found only by chance in the provinces. They had not been read and so no longer existed at Rome.[2] Anderson argued long ago that when Ovid composed his *Heroides* he always preferred the best-known source.[3] A useful canon. Wilamowitz declared the same was true of Seneca Tragicus:[4] "Aber als er Tragödien dichten wollte, griff er nach Elektra Oidipus Trachinierinnen Polyxena Thyestes von Sophokles, Medeia beiden Hippolytos Hekabe Troerinnen Phoenissen Phaethon Kresphontes Herakles von Euripides, Agamemnon von Aischylos. Wahrscheinlich hat er noch viel mehr gelesen. Von römischen Tragödien natürlich nur die beiden der augusteischen Zeit, nicht die barbarischen Übersetzungen des 2. Jahrhunderts." I find the view reasonable, although recently several young scholars have sought to revive the opinion that Seneca used Republican sources.[5] Does even one verse in Seneca require a Republican source in the sense of so many verses in Lucretius and Vergil? The occasional tags in his prose works (e.g., *oderint dum metuant* at *De ira* 1. 20. 4, *Clem.* 1. 12. 4, 2. 2. 2) derive from an intermediary source or oral tradition[6] and betray no direct

---

1. Hence Horatian attention to tragedy in *Ars poetica* and the pervasive influence of Latin tragedy on Vergil: see S. Stabryła, *Latin Tragedy in Virgil's Poetry* (Wrocław, 1970). Contrarily, direct influence of Greek tragedy is scarcely detectable: see A. König, *Die Aeneis und die griechische Tragödie: Studien zur imitatio-Technik Vergils* (Diss. West Berlin, 1970). F. Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen zur Kritik und Geschichte der Komödie*[2] (Berlin, 1912), p. 25, could observe: "Vergil ist noch Romantiker."

2. See Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen*, p. 23.

3. J. N. Anderson, *On the Sources of Ovid's "Heroides" I, III, VII, X, XII* (Berlin, 1896), p. 76. The premise is generally sound rather than foolproof: see H. Jacobson, *Ovid's "Heroides"* (Princeton, 1974), p. 213.

4. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Euripides "Herakles"*[3] (Darmstadt, 1969), 1:174, n. 105.

5. See Stabryła, *Latin Tragedy*, p. 121: "Seneca, who was certainly well acquainted with Accius' plays . . . ," and J. Dingel, *Seneca und die Dichtung* (Heidelberg, 1974), p. 56; cf. A. Lesky, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Bern, 1966), p. 540.

6. Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen*, p. 26, and the dissertation by his pupil F. Strauss, *De ratione*

acquaintance with the "mouldy diction of Ennius and Accius" (*verborum situs: Epist. mor.* 58. 5). Seneca's source is Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.[7] Divergencies are his innovations. His play is not a translation any more than the Augustus of Prima Porta is a copy of the Doryphoros. He read the old play as Sartre read Arthur Miller's *Crucible*, and saw an opportunity to rewrite it in the light of his philosophical presuppositions.[8]

The absolute date of composition or performance is unknowable.[9] There was never public performance and hence no *didaskaliai*. I have found no convincing historical allusion in any Senecan tragedy with the exception of a reference to Nero's projected Corinthian canal at *Medea* 35 (cf. Suet. *Nero* 19).[10] Popular assignment of the plays to his exile at Corsica assumes that only then would he have had time to compose. But tragedies would have been very much in the nature of occasional verse.[11] Any Vergilian associations should be discarded; Pliny attests (*Epist.* 7. 4. 2–10) how casual composition was. Seneca knew the story well. He had memorized vast stretches of Horace, Ovid (*ille poeta ingeniosissimus: QNat.* 3. 27. 13), and *Vergilius noster* (*Epist. mor.* 56. 12, 59. 3).[12] Q. Cicero wrote four tragedies in sixteen days (*QFr.* 3. 5. 7).

A contribution may be made to relative chronology. Leo[13] held *Agamemnon* to be the first tragedy that Seneca wrote largely because of irregularities in the anapests. Consideration of the prologue suggests otherwise. Seneca discarded the opening monologue of the Aeschylean *phylax* for *Thyestis umbra*. Not the ghost of Atreus, who could not gloat, but Thyestes, who had forsaken Stoic self-sufficiency and indifference, may be the greater villain. The prologue is Senecan innovation. Verses 15–16 prove it: "ubi ille celeri corpus evinctus rotae / in se refertur." Ixion is not in the underworld before Apollonius Rhodius (3. 61 ff.), whom the Romans followed.[14] Euripides' Ixion was spreadeagled on his wheel,[15] while Seneca's is bound to the rim in the manner of Ovid *Metamorphoses* 4. 461: "volvitur Ixion et se

---

inter Senecam et antiquas fabulas Romanas intercedente (Diss. Rostock, 1887), p. 20, who convinced K. Ziegler, s.v. "Tragoedia," *RE* 6A (1937): 2008. 11 ff.; cf. Wilamowitz, *Euripides "Herakles,"* 1: 174, n. 105.

7. For a useful summary of earlier work on the sources see L. Herrmann, *Le Théâtre de Sénèque* (Paris, 1924), pp. 305–312. There has been a good deal of inconclusive speculation on lost Republican translations. For the general lack of interest in *Agamemnon* after F. Leo's damning remarks (*L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae*, vol. 1: *Observationes criticae* [Berlin, 1878], p. 163), see B. Seidensticker, *Die Gesprächsverdichtung in den Tragödien Senecas* (Heidelberg, 1969), pp. 119–20.

8. "Nicht Imitation, sondern durchaus Neuformung eines übernommenen Stoffes unter eigenen neuen Kategorien": O. Regenbogen, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. F. Dirlmeier (Munich, 1961), p. 431.

9. For a summary of futile attempts to know: Herrmann, *Théâtre*, pp. 79 ff.

10. Oddly not noticed at Herrmann, *Théâtre*, pp. 89–91. I find no cogency in any equation Medea–Agrippina or Poppaea–Cassandra.

11. See Sir Ronald Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), 1: 93: "Roman tradition did not regard serious poetical endeavours . . . as proper or predominant occupation for a senator, still less as any basis for enduring fame."

12. See L. Doppioni, *Virgilio nell'arte e nel pensiero di Seneca* (Florence, 1939).

13. *Observationes*, p. 133.

14. See P. Weizsäcker, s.v. "Ixion (11)," Roscher *Lex.*, 2.1: 768–69, where correct the Apollonius reference from 2. 62 to 3. 62; O. Waser, s.v. "Ixion," *RE* 10 (1919): 1377. 39 ff.; and K. F. Smith *ad* Tibull. 1. 3. 73–74.

15. See Plut. *Mor.* 19E and T. B. L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating Tragedy and Satyr Play²*, BICS Suppl., no. 20 (London, 1967), p. 160.

sequiturque fugitque." Obvious classical traces are found. The ghost begins with the words of a famous Sophoclean predecessor, Achilles' shade in *Polyxena*, lines already adapted by Euripides to begin *Hecuba*.[16] A second echo of this play, one of the three sources of *Troades*, may be detected at *Agamemnon* 462 (cf. Soph. frag. 525 Pearson), a reference to the gathering storm.[17]

The prologue of *Agamemnon* shows considerable similarity to the prologue of *Thyestes*. Indeed verses 18–22 refer to Tantalus, the ghostly prologist of *Thyestes*, and line 7 to the scene of the action in *Thyestes*. Verses 28 ff. (the incestuous union) fulfill the Fury's prophecy (*peius tamen nascuntur*) at *Thyestes* 22. Verses 8–9 recall *Thyestes* 657; and 26–27 summarize the action of *Thyestes* 749 ff.[18] Which prologue is the earlier? Surely the one that fits better the subsequent action. What one may call "prologue-motifs" are traceable throughout *Thyestes*. Selectively: 144 ff. are a choral recitation of Tantalus' crime and punishment. At 147 he is apostrophized. At 242–44 Atreus recalls his grandfather's crime. At 250 he invokes the *dira Furiarum cohors*. *Abunde* (279) recalls 105. Thyestes' eldest son (421 ff.) is named Tantalus. At 987 the wine and blood recoil from Thyestes' lips precisely as the water does from Tantalus' (169–75). At 1011 Thyestes recalls Tantalus. The crimes of Tantalus (144 ff.) and of Atreus—murder, cooking, and eating of children—are the same. The topos of the revulsion of nature, first in the Fury's speech (107–121), recurs in the subsequent action (esp. 691 ff., 767 ff., 784 ff., 1092–96). Food and water withdraw from Tantalus' grasp (152 ff.) in Tartarus. But on earth springs, rivers, and trees do as well (105 ff.). In the Fury's speech this becomes by extension the revulsion of nature from the crime to be. The sun hesitates to begin the new day (120–21; cf. 784 ff.). F. Stoessl rightly concludes:[19] "Dieser Prolog tritt als grauenhaft bewegte Handlung vor die Thyesteshandlung selbst, als Ursache und Folie zugleich. . . . Auch wenn weder die Furie noch Tantalus' Schatten später noch auftritt, wirkt doch alles Geschehen als Folge der Prologhandlung."

The *Agamemnon* prologue, however, which is a monologue less than half the length of the other, padded with the traditional punishments of Hades (12–21), and in which the speaker's entrance is unmotivated, connects with the subsequent action only because—in the Euripidean manner[20]—the action is summarized and anticipated.[21] Thematic echoes are lacking, unless one tabulates details like Marlowe's *mille . . . rates* (40; cf. 171, 430). The

16. Soph. frag. 523 Pearson. The Greek source is unnoticed by K. Heldmann, *Untersuchungen zu den Tragödien Senecas*, Hermes Einzelschriften, no. 31 (Wiesbaden, 1974) pp. 7–8. K. Anliker, *Prologe und Akteinteilung in Senecas Tragödien*, Noctes Romanae, no. 9 (Bern, 1960), p. 11, wrongly argues imitation of *Hecuba*. Similarities between Sen. *Ag.* (and *Troades!*) and *Hecuba* exist because both imitate the lost *Polyxena* prologue. In *Polyxena* the words were spoken to Agamemnon, which perhaps encouraged imitation by Seneca here: for a reconstruction of the tragedy, see *GRBS* 7 (1966): 31–56.

17. See A. von Blumenthal, s.v. "Sophokles (1)," *RE* 3A (1927): 1073. 30–31.

18. Already noted by T. Thomann, ed. and trans., *Seneca: Sämtliche Tragödien*, vol. 2 (Zurich, 1969), p. 462.

19. S.v. "Prologos," *RE* 23 (1959): 2426. 40 ff.

20. Anliker, *Prologe*, pp. 1 ff., has good remarks on Euripidean characteristics in the prologue.

21. "Der Prolog ist weder Teil der Handlung, noch vorgesetzte Exposition," Stoessl, *RE* 23 (1959): 2420. 31–32.

prologue concludes with reference to the miracle of a νὺξ μακρά (53–56; cf. 908–9):

> Sed cur repente noctis aestivae vices
> hiberna longa spatia producunt mora,
> aut quid cadentes detinet stellas polo?
> Phoebum moramur? redde iam mundo diem.

This is an obvious parallel to the end of the *Thyestes* prologue (120–21):[22] "en ipse Titan dubitat an iubeat sequi / cogatque habenis ire periturum diem." The lines fit the context of *Thyestes* better, for they present the culmination of nature's revulsion in the Fury's speech, while *Agamemnon* 53–56 follow abruptly the apostrophe of the absent Aegisthus[23] to provide a lame excuse for the ghost's exit.[24] Clearly the *Agamemnon* prologue was a Senecan innovation, replacing the uninteresting Aeschylean original and modeled on the *Thyestes* prologue, itself possibly Sophoclean.[25] *Agamemnon* was at best Seneca's second tragedy. Leo should be corrected.

There exists one further extensive Senecan innovation. Aeschylus had conveniently removed Orestes from the action by placing him under the care of a "friendly ally Strophius the Phocian" (Aesch. *Ag.* 880 ff.). Seneca expanded the hint and composed a remarkable scene (910–46) containing four characters not in the *exemplar graecum*. Cassandra is on stage. Electra enters from the *scaenae frons* with the child Orestes, whom she urges to fly. The providential arrival of Strophius with Pylades provides the means for Orestes' escape. The scene appears an unnecessary dramatization of a messenger speech. Two anachronisms support Senecan origin. Anachronisms abound in Greek tragedy, not least in Euripides; but I doubt that a Greek would introduce a Bronze Age king as Olympic victor (918–19). Cogent proof, certainly of postclassical, if not Senecan, composition, is that Strophius bears an Elean palm (918–19), *victricem . . . frondem* (936–37). The palm of victory, absent from Pindar and Bacchylides, is attested first in Chrysippus (frag. 699, Von Arnim, *SVF*, 3: 175) and then often among Roman authors of the empire.[26] What is the purpose of Seneca's emphatic addition, of

---

22. Cf. Sen. *Controv.* 1. 1. 23: "impias epulas, detestabili parricidio fugatum diem."

23. "Causa natalis tui, / Aegisthe, venit" (48–49) does not mean "the author of thy birth has come, Aegisthus" (F. J. Miller, ed. and trans., *Seneca's Tragedies*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 2 [London, 1929], p. 7), but "the reason for thy birth is at hand, Aegisthus" (cf. *tempus . . . adest:* 226–27), and thus Thomann, *Tragödien*, 2: 189, and Stoessl, *RE* 23 (1959): 2420. 21–22: "Die Ursache für Deine Geburt ist da"; cf. Anliker, *Prologe*, p. 18. Aegisthus certainly does not appear on stage during the prologue ("Anrede an den vergegenwärtigen Agisth, der zum fiktiven Gesprächs-partner wird," Thomann, 2: 463, rightly). Seneca took the device from Aesch. *Ag.* 83 ff., where the chorus apostrophize Clytemnestra as though present: see Wilamowitz, *Aischylos Interpretationen* (Berlin, 1914), p. 164, and E. Fraenkel ad loc.

24. Stoessl's summary, at *RE* 23 (1959): 2420. 30–31, is hasty: "Weder das Auftreten noch der Abgang des Schattens wird motiviert."

25. For the view that *Agamemnon* followed *Thyestes* and that the prologue of the earlier play is "nicht Senecas Eigentum," see Lesky, *Ges. Schr.*, p. 534, after F. G. Welcker, *Griechische Tragödien*, vol. 3 (Bonn, 1841), p. 1448. Lesky prefers because of similarity to *Herakles* a Euripidean original (p. 535). But the motif of the reluctant sun (Sen. *Thy.* 120–21, 776 ff., 793 ff.) is beyond doubt Sophoclean (*Anth. Pal.* 9. 98. 2; cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 88).

26. See F. B. Tarbell, "The Palm of Victory," *CP* 3 (1908): 264–72. A. Steier, s.v. "Phoinix (1)," *RE* 20 (1941): 401–2, who does not know Tarbell, considers the palm branch Roman and imperial by ignoring Chrysippus.

crowning Orestes on stage and placing the victor's palm in his hand? In what sense is Orestes victor?

This leads to a decisive question. Who is hero of the piece? Or is there a hero? The obvious choice is Agamemnon himself, whom an astute critic[27] still calls "der Hauptheld des Stücks." His is the title role. But the title is simply an Aeschylean survival,[28] and Aeschylus' play by modern standards would be entitled *Clytemnestra*. The Senecan king enters at 781 and exits at 807 (twenty-six verses later).[29] His function is to elicit from Cassandra in tight epigrammatic *antilabai*[30] the information that establishes him as the deutero-Priam, the *semper idem* motif[31] that we have already noted in the Tantalus–Thyestes equation of *Thyestes*. In Aeschylus Agamemnon has not a word for Cassandra. Because Clytemnestra is the Aeschylean protagonist, critics do not lack who seek to elevate Seneca's heroine to that role. For the commentator Giomini,[32] *Agamemnon* "è la tragedia di Clitemnestra." J. M. Croisille[33] in the best defense of the view calls her the "personnage principal de la pièce." Surely the most casual comparison to Aeschylus reveals the opposite. Seneca's Clytemnestra is sheared of her greatest speeches. She has lost the ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ (Aesch. *Ag.* 11) to Electra (*animos viriles*, 958) to gain in return a woman's tricks (*femineos dolos*, 116). Her vulgar catalogue of Agamemnon's loves (175 ff.)[34] expands the discreet allusion of the Aeschylean queen (*Ag.* 1439). She discards the advice of the *nutrix*, who is not so much "the mouthpiece of Seneca"[35] as a means to extract revelation of character from Clytemnestra while avoiding a lengthy and artificial monologue. The *satelles* of *Thyestes* and *nutrix* of *Phaedra* are obvious parallels. These characters have usurped a function of the *coryphaeus* in classical tragedy; for in Seneca generally the small mobile chorus is visible only during the stasima.[36] The *nutrix* exits at 225, the entrance of Aegisthus. The subsequent scene had long been misunderstood because critics[37] believed Clytemnestra's scruples sincere. Croisille has

27. E. Lefèvre, "Schicksal und Selbstverschuldung in Senecas *Agamemnon*," *Senecas Tragödien*, ed. E. Lefèvre, Wege der Forschung, no. 310 (Darmstadt, 1972), p. 461; cf. Lefèvre, "Die Schuld des Agamemnon," *Hermes* 101 (1973): 89: "Es versteht sich, dass Agamemnon die 'interessantere' Figur ist." Nonetheless, Lefèvre in both articles stresses the importance of Cassandra.

28. But see Seidensticker, *Gesprächsverdichtung*, p. 136, n. 178.

29. Ibid., p. 120 and p. 139 with n. 188.

30. Ibid., p. 119–40. The elucidation of these crucial verses is brilliant.

31. See the excellent article of K. K. Lohikoski, "Der Parallelismus Mykene–Troja in Senecas *Agamemnon*," *Arctos*, n.s. 4 (1966): 63–68, and Seidensticker, *Gesprächsverdichtung*, p. 124: "Die Parallelisierung der Schicksale von Argos und Troia ist ein Leitmotiv der Tragoedie, das bereits in den vorangegangenen Szenen immer wieder angeklungen ist und bis zum Schluss seine Bedeutung behält."

32. R. Giomini, ed., *Senecae "Agamemnon"* (Rome, 1956), p. 7.

33. "Le Personnage de Clytemnestre dans l'*Agamemnon* de Sénèque," *Latomus* 23 (1964): 464–72.

34. "*Amore captae captus*" (175) is a typically Senecan echo of "*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit*" (Hor. *Epist.* 2. 1. 56); cf. *vicimus victi* (869) and the famous *victamque victricemque* (754), whose ambiguity Lohikoski, "Parallelismus in Senecas *Agamemnon*," p. 68, has understood.

35. "Das Sprachrohr Senecas," A. Sipple, *Der Staatsman und Dichter Seneca als politischer Erzieher* (Würzburg, 1938), p. 72. Sipple's treatment of *Agamemnon* (pp. 71–74) is naïve and unconvincing and depends on an unproved dating.

36. See *CP* 70 (1975): 32–35.

37. Especially Regenbogen, *Kl. Schr.*, p. 433, after Herrmann, *Théâtre*, pp. 411–13; and recently see C. J. Herington, *Arion* 5 (1966): 454: "The inferior's arguments temporarily convince the superior." Obviously the script could be played this way.

argued persuasively that Clytemnestra deceives Aegisthus in order to strengthen the resolution of a man "plus virile pour l'adultère que pour les combats."[38] A gesture at 239 and the manner of delivery would make the ruse clear to an audience. The hesitation at 239 and reversal at 308 proceed κατὰ τὸ εἰκός only if feigned, the *feminei doli* of which we have already been warned (116). R. Peiper[39] suspected that an entire Clytemnestra-Agamemnon scene had been lost before the third stasimon, a splendid example of treating Seneca as muddled Aeschylus. That the carpet scene in Seneca takes place offstage is further proof of his intent to detract from the queen's importance. When Seneca's Agamemnon first appears at 782, he has already decided to enter the palace and his "guilt" is not a problem.

If Seneca has reduced the roles of the Aeschylean Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, is there a character whose role he has expanded? Cassandra obviously. Her entrance is arranged to precede Agamemnon's—quite abnormally. Captives should follow their captors. And she enters (589) with a train, the "second chorus" of Trojan women; Agamemnon enters alone with his wife, unwelcomed by the hostile chorus (contrast the great anapests of Aesch. *Ag.* 782 ff.). Cassandra's great speech and aria (720–74), delivered before the entrance of the king, establish the fundamental *semper idem* motif, between Agamemnon–Clytemnestra–Aegisthus–Mycenae and Priam–Helen–Paris–Troy.[40] The structure of the play affords another clue to the importance we should attach to Cassandra. There is a distinct tendency in Seneca to place his climax in act 4, presumably a fourth-century practice already reflected in Menandrean comedy.[41] The third *epeisodion* (659–807) falls into two "scenes," Cassandra and the chorus (659–781), and Cassandra and Agamemnon (782–807), the whole dominated by the priestess. Aeschylus' Cassandra is a brilliant substitute for a messenger. In her role as a seer she describes the regicide while it takes place (Schiller in *Maria Stuart* adapts the device), not afterwards, like the ordinary ἄγγελος. Seneca's Cassandra does this too (867–909), but survives to deliver the enigmatic last verse. Her death—like the death of Homer's Achilles—is not within the dramatic action.[42]

I should like to expound an interpretation of the play that stresses the importance of Cassandra and provides a unity of the various parts that has eluded several critics. I do not claim the only right interpretation, but simply a defensible one. The play is controversial and has always evoked a variety of responses.[43] Seneca's *Agamemnon* examines the reactions of various people to the fact of death, and condemns an ignorant *vitae durus*

---

38. "Personnage de Clytemnestre," p. 467.

39. R. Peiper and G. Richter, eds., *L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae*[2] (Leipzig, 1937), p. 271, *ad Ag.* 807.

40. This is established in Lohikoski, "Parallelismus in Senecas *Agamemnon*," pp. 63–70.

41. For the Horatian five-act division in Seneca, see Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen*, p. 231; Herrmann, *Théâtre*, pp. 336–37; and, for *Oedipus*, W. H. Friedrich, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas dramatischer Technik* (Borna–Leipzig, 1933), pp. 148–51.

42. For the importance of her survival, see Anliker, *Prologe*, p. 122, and Lefèvre, "Schicksal und Selbstverschuldung," p. 468.

43. The whole conception of the "exclusive interpretation" is naïvely unhistorical: see *GRBS* 9 (1968): 406, n. 74.

*amor* (590). Clytemnestra's wrath is motivated by revenge for Iphigenia's death (158–59 and 162 ff.),[44] but, as the "Stoic adviser" observes in lines 160–61 (much on the lines of Cassandra at Euripides *Troades* 386 ff.), death made Iphigenia a civic benefactor. She got the fleet going and contributed grandly to the war effort. Because of ignorance Clytemnestra's judgment is defective. Aegisthus only convinces Clytemnestra of his loyalty when he agrees to suicide at her request (303–5). Deluded humanity is represented by the piety of the Argive chorus (310 ff.).[45] The point of their invocation of heedless gods is precisely that it is pointless. "Desine fata deum flecti sperare precando" (Verg. *Aen.* 6. 376). What good will the piety of Eurybates (392–96) do? His "interminable speech"[46] describing the storm in terms of *Aeneid* 1, "a full seventh of the play,"[47] has often been dismissed by critics as extraneous to the action. D. Henry and B. Walker are typical:[48] "One cannot help thinking that Seneca introduced these narrative passages into his tragedies mainly because he felt they were indispensable to tragedy as a recognized literary form. They have to be read as pieces of occasional writing detached from the rest of the play and alien to it in style and often in feeling." The unfortunate Zwierlein[49] even adduced the speech as an argument against performance. There has been welcome recent attention from more thoughtful critics. Seidensticker[50] sees the speech as first retaliation for the destruction of Troy and *praeludium* for the murder of Agamemnon. Lefèvre[51] interprets Ajax son of Oileus, in the account of whose destruction the speech culminates (532 ff.), as the prototype of the fully responsible hybristic man, a type to be developed in Agamemnon. There is a further purpose. Ajax, rather than the precursor of Agamemnon, is the antithesis of Cassandra. He struggles, *solus invictus malis* (532), against death to win only agony, a reputation for blasphemy, and the briefest extension of an intensely painful existence. "Vivre, vivre à tout prix"[52] is the appalling alternative to *libera mors*, "death that brings freedom" (591),[53] of the chorus of Trojan captives who enter at 589. Their cry (611) "o quam miserum nescire mori" is the best commentary on Ajax'

44. The subject of *praestitit* at 159 is surely Achilles and not Agamemnon as F. J. Miller takes it, *Seneca's Tragedies*, 2: 17, n. 2. *Matri* is loosely used for Achilles' putative mother-in-law.
45. For an attempt to establish the thematic relevance of the gods invoked to the action, see Seidensticker, *Gesprächsverdichtung*, p. 131, n. 163, with the further remarks of Lefèvre, "Schuld des Agamemnon," p. 80, n. 3.
46. "Cette interminable narration," Herrmann, *Théâtre*, p. 456.
47. Lohikoski, "Parallelismus in Senecas *Agamemnon*."
48. D. Henry and B. Walker, "Seneca and the *Agamemnon*: Some Thoughts on Tragic Doom," *CP* 58 (1963): 7; cf. C. W. Mendell, *Our Seneca* (New Haven, 1941), p. 150: "it has no bearing whatsoever on the plot."
49. O. Zwierlein, *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas mit einem kritisch-exegetischen Anhang*, Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie, no. 20 (Meisenheim am Glan, 1966), pp. 112 ff. Compare his comment on the Eurybates speech (p. 113, n. 3): "So fremd solche Prunkerzählungen dem echten Dramatiker sind, so gross ist Senecas Vorliebe für sie."
50. *Gesprächsverdichtung*, p. 128, n. 157.
51. Lefèvre, "Schuld des Agamemnon," p. 82: "der Prototyp des in voller Verantwortlichkeit handelnden hybrishaften Menschen."
52. See J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles*, pt. 1, *The Ajax* (Leyden, 1953), ad 473–80.
53. Rather than F. J. Miller's "death with generous hand"; contrast Thomann's "der befreiende Tod."

protracted and unnecessary end. In their *Iliou persis* (612–58), composed in the language of *Aeneid* 2,[54] joy precedes ruin as Agamemnon's banquet precedes his murder. Agamemnon in the robes of Priam (880), and drinking from the cup of Assaracus (878), dies, not merely stabbed as in Aeschylus, but beheaded by Clytemnestra, as the Vergilian Priam was beheaded by Pyrrhus.[55] There is the palace banquet ("epulae regia instructae domo," 875) and blood mingles in the cup with wine (886). Priam and Thyestes attend Agamemnon's death. *Semper idem.* Aegisthus is Thyestes' son; Clytemnestra Helen's sister (907).[56] Precisely at the end of Cassandra's "messenger speech," the celebration of a triumph as false as that of the Greeks at Troy, Orestes is crowned with olive and given the victor's frond of palm. Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus, by the measures of their own values, are the losers. Agamemnon has lost a life he thought precious. The regicides have won delusive power and a little time but morally at what cost! Orestes will return, the deutero-Agamemnon, but victor of a different sort.

F. H. Sandbach, rather in the spirit of H. J. Rose, has recently told us, "It is hard for the Englishman of today to approach Seneca with sympathy."[57] "Yet," we are assured, "he deserves pity and understanding."[58] For a young American it is not so hard; for an East European it is easy. The paradox is that only the slave is free. *Libertas adest*, said Cassandra (796) to a disbelieving Agamemnon. *Libertas* is "potestas vivendi ut velis" (Cic. *Paradoxa* 5. 34).[59] Like Hecuba in Seneca's *Troades*, Cassandra has been hurt so much that she is immune to further pain. In our ignorance we are prisoners of the world (*vincula rerum, Med.* 376). In our ignorance we exaggerate *privata bona—pudor, cura iuris, sanctitas, pietas, fides* (*Thy.* 215 ff.). This creates *metus*, anxiety, the curse of the misinformed.[60] Seneca's *Oedipus* is largely the tragedy of a man caught in *metus* and freed only by knowledge. Seneca was attracted by the tragic fear of the poets (e.g., Aeschylus' *Prometheus*)[61] which he saw in Stoic terms.

Paradoxically we are freed from *metus* by *scelus*, an "awesome deed," not "crime." *Facinus* and *crimen* are pejorative in Senecan tragedy; *scelus* need

54. Casual attention to *Ag.* 627–37 yields the following parallels: *simulata dona* (*Ag.* 627) and *timeo Danaos et dona ferentis* (*Aen.* 2. 49); *molis immensae* (*Ag.* 628) and *molem . . . equi* (*Aen.* 2. 32); *limine in primo sonipes* (*Ag.* 630) and *ad limina primi / Poenorum expectant . . . stat sonipes* (*Aen.* 4. 133–35); *dolos versare* (*Ag.* 632) and *versare dolos* (*Aen.* 2. 62; cf. 11. 704); *parmae* at *Ag.* 634 and *Aen.* 2. 175 and 11. 693; for *male* as quasi-negative at *Ag.* 636, cf. *male sana* at *Aen.* 4. 8 with Pease and Austin ad loc. A careful scrutiny would find many more resemblances.

55. See my note at *CP* 69 (1974): 227–28.

56. Vengeance certainly is a prominent motif in *Agamemnon*, as T. Birt long ago detected: "die Idee dieses Stückes ist nichts anderes als 'Rache für Ilions Fall' " ("Was hat Seneca mit seinen Tragödien gewollt?" *NJA* 27 [1911]: 358). I should add revenge for Atreus' crime as well.

57. F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (London, 1975), p. 161.

58. Ibid., p. 162.

59. For a brief summary of *libertas* in Seneca see M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa: Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung*, vol. 1 (Göttingen, 1948), p. 315. A detailed study is lacking and needed.

60. *Metus* is *opinio impendentis mali* (Cic. *Tusc.* 4. 7. 14 = Chrysippus frag. 395, von Arnim, *SVF*, 3: 95). *Cautio* is rational and approved, while *metus* is *a ratione aversa cautio* (*Tusc.* 4. 6. 13). See further I. Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung*, Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie, no. 13 (Berlin, 1969), p. 26, n. 93. A careful investigation of *metus* and related words in Seneca Tragicus is needed.

61. See especially J. de Romilly, *La Crainte et l'angoisse dans le théâtre d'Eschyle* (Paris, 1958).

not be. Herrmann[62] spoke of "la volupté du crime" in Seneca. The destruction of Troy and all it implies was the *scelus* of the Greeks that freed Hecuba and Cassandra. The freest people in Solzhenitsyn's Soviet Union live in Siberian concentration camps. But the *scelus* of the Greeks increased their own *metus*, a lesson of Euripides' Trojan trilogy,[63] a favorite of Seneca. The *scelus* of another may bring one *libertas* or one's own *scelus*, the *maximum scelus* of Oedipus (*Oed.* 629), the *ultimum scelus* of Medea (*Med.* 923), who, after she killed her children and hurled them at Jason, gained freedom. Nothing else mattered anymore. Jason could be hurt because he still cared. That is a mistake. One needs indifference.[64]

A word on the end of the play. Unless Cassandra has exited at 909 to re-enter at 1004 after the exit of Electra at 1000, four actors are required for the exodos (910–1012). The vocative at 952 is easier if Cassandra is on stage (although at 49 the absent Aegisthus is addressed directly). Clytemnestra enters at 952 to quarrel in the familiar way with Electra until the entrance of Aegisthus at 978; he threatens Electra with incarceration unless she reveals Orestes. Electra pleads for death, *concede mortem* (994), in the manner of Jason at *Medea* 1005. Aegisthus, precisely like Atreus[65] (*semper idem*), refuses the easier punishment. "What is worse than death? Life, if you wish to die" (996). The curse of the Senecan Heracles is his immortality. Electra at 1000 is dragged away from death. At 1003 Clytemnestra orders extras to drag (*trahite*) Cassandra offstage to death. Cassandra, freed of the *vitae durus amor*, replies (1004), "ne trahite, vestros ipsa praecedam gradus." Thus the fearless Hecuba replied to Odysseus (*Troad.* 993): "duc, duc, Vlixe, nil moror, dominum sequor." With words reminiscent of the Platonic Socrates (Plato *Ap.* 40E ff.; cf. Hyperides *Epitaph.* 35 ff.) she anticipates joyously conversation with the dead in Hades.

The difficult last verse (1012) remains. Clytemnestra cries in rage, *furiosa, morere.* Anliker[66] has suggested (comparing *nunc morere* at Verg. *Aen.* 2. 550, where Neoptolemos stabs Priam) that with these words Clytemnestra stabs Cassandra. Contrast *moriere demens* (*HF* 429), a threat to a character who survives. Seidensticker[67] inclines to approval. I should add that *ferrum* at 960 and 973 is effective if Clytemnestra is armed. But decisive against Anliker's stage stabbing are (1) the reluctance of the *exemplaria graeca* to allow deeds of violence on stage and (2) the stage direction, *trahite* (1003), which has already been given and would not be so abruptly rescinded. Cassandra's last words, which end the play, are as

62. Herrmann, *Théâtre*, p. 491. See especially *Medea* 991–92: "voluptas magna me invitam subit, / et ecce crescit."

63. See especially G. Murray, "Euripides' Tragedies of 415 B.C.: The Deceitfulness of Life," *Greek Studies* (Oxford, 1946), pp. 127–48, and, for the irony of the known end, E. G. O'Neill, Jr., "The Prologue of the *Troades* of Euripides," *TAPA* 72 (1941): 288–320, both peculiarly "Senecan" interpretations.

64. See the useful article of M. E. Reesor, " 'Indifferents' in the Old and Middle Stoa," *TAPA* 82 (1951): 102–110.

65. Compare "rudis est tyrannus morte qui poenam exigit" (*Ag.* 995) with "perimat tyrannus lenis; in regno meo / mors impetratur" (*Thy.* 247–48). Compare *HF* 511–12. Creon provided a hint at Soph. *Ant.* 308 ff.

66. Anliker, *Prologe*, p. 122, n. 267.

67. Seidensticker, *Gesprächsverdichtung*, p. 136, n. 177.

enigmatic as anything she ever said: "veniet et vobis furor." Otto Ribbeck[68] long ago applied them to the vengeance of Orestes. Critics have followed him, and Seidensticker[69] aptly compares Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1667. The difficulty is that Orestes was not mad when he murdered Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but after the crime. I think rather that *furor* picks up *furiosa* and means "what you call madness, the desire for death, will in time come upon you both." In the Senecan manner the *metus* of the regicides will teach them in time the meaning of *mors libera*.[70]

*Columbia University*